

# **LAND STEWARDSHIP ZONING GUIDELINES**

## **DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION**

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### **Background**

In July, 2003 state legislation established the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), consisting of a Division of Urban Parks and Recreation, a Division of State Parks and Recreation, and a Division of Water Supply Protection. This legislation essentially merged the former Department of Environmental Management (DEM) and the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC). In addition, the legislation required the preparation of management plans for state parks, forests and reservations under the management of DCR (Chapter 21, Section 2F). This legislation states that management plans shall include guidelines for operation and land stewardship, provide for the protection and stewardship of natural and cultural resources, and shall ensure consistency between recreation, resource protection, and sustainable forest management.

As part of addressing this legislative requirement, land stewardship zoning guidelines will be incorporated into the development and implementation of DCR Resource Management Plans. These Land Stewardship Zoning Guidelines (Guidelines) represent a revision of the previous Land Stewardship Zoning system developed by Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) agencies in the early 1990s, and which had been applied to the preparation of management plans for state parks, forests and reservations under the management of the former DEM.

The purpose of these revised Guidelines is to provide a general land stewardship zoning framework for the development of Resource Management Plans for all state reservations, parks and forests under the management of the DCR Divisions of Urban Parks and Recreation and State Parks and Recreation. The Guidelines do not apply to Division of Water Supply Protection (DWSP) properties because DWSP watershed planning has a separate legislative mandate and established planning procedures.

### **Overview of Guidelines**

The Guidelines define three types of zones to address the legislative requirement to provide for the protection and stewardship of natural and cultural resources and to ensure consistency between recreation, resource protection, and sustainable forest management. The Guidelines are intended to provide a general land stewardship zoning framework that is flexible and that can guide the long-term management of a given DCR property or facility. The three zones may be supplemented with significant feature overlays that identify specific designated/recognized resource features (such as Forest Reserves, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, or areas subject to historic preservation restrictions). DCR parks, forests and reservations are also subject to specific policy guidelines and/or performance standards (such as Executive Order No. 181 for Barrier Beaches) and applicable environmental laws and regulations of the Commonwealth.

Application of the three-zone system to a particular DCR park, forest or reservation is facilitated by the development and application of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology. GIS resource overlays provide a general screen whereby lands of special resource significance and sensitivity can be mapped and identified. General landscape features such as forested areas, wetlands, streams and ponds can also be mapped as part of this overlay approach. Further, additional data regarding recreational uses and developed facilities and sites can be added. This type of mapping and data collection, based on the best information currently available, provides the basis for subsequent analysis and ultimately the development and application of appropriate land stewardship zoning guidelines to a specific state park, forest or reservation.

Land Stewardship Zoning Guidelines provide a foundation for recommendations that will address resource stewardship and facility management objectives, and are intended to cover both existing DCR property or facility conditions and desired future conditions for that property or facility. Proposals for changing the Guidelines in a previously approved Resource Management Plan should be submitted to the DCR Stewardship Council for review and adoption.

## **Land Stewardship Zones**

### **Zone 1**

#### **General Description**

This zone includes unique, exemplary and highly sensitive resources and landscapes that require special management approaches and practices to protect and preserve the special features and values identified in the specific Resource Management Plan. Examples of these resources include rare species habitat identified by the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program as being highly sensitive to human activities, fragile archaeological or cultural sites, and unique or exemplary natural communities. Management objectives emphasize protecting these areas from potentially adverse disturbances and impacts.

#### **General Management Guidelines**

- Only dispersed, low-impact, non-motorized, sustainable recreation will be allowed provided that the activities do not threaten or impact unique and highly sensitive resources.
- Existing trails and roads will be evaluated to ensure compatibility with identified resource features and landscape, and will be discontinued if there are suitable sustainable alternatives. New trails may be constructed only after a strict evaluation of need and avoidance of any potential adverse impacts on identified resources. New roads may only be constructed to meet public health and safety needs or requirements; however, the project design and siting process must avoid any potential adverse impacts on identified resources and demonstrate that there are no other suitable alternatives.
- Vegetation or forest management will be utilized only to preserve and enhance identified resource features and landscapes.

## **Zone 2**

### **General Description**

This Zone includes areas containing typical yet important natural and cultural resources on which common forestry practices and dispersed recreational activities can be practiced at sustainable levels that do not degrade these resources, and that hold potential for improving their ecological health, productivity and/or protection through active management. Examples include terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems characterized by a diversity of wildlife and plant habitats, rare species habitat that is compatible with sustainable forestry and dispersed recreation, agricultural resources, and resilient cultural sites and landscapes. Zone 2 areas may be actively managed provided that the management activities are consistent with the approved Resource Management Plan for the property.

### **General Management Guidelines**

- Management approaches and actions may include a wide range of potential recreational opportunities and settings that are consistent and compatible with natural resource conservation and management goals.
- Utilize Best Management Practices for forestry and other resource management activities to encourage native biodiversity, protect rare species habitats and landforms.
- Protect and maintain water quality by providing for healthy functioning terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.
- Provide a safe, efficient transportation network with minimal impact on natural and cultural resources while serving public safety needs and allowing visitors to experience a variety of outdoor activities.
- New trails may be allowed dependent upon existing area trail densities, purpose and need, physical suitability of the site, and specific guidelines for protection of rare species habitat and archaeological resources.
- Sustainable forest management activities may be undertaken following guidelines established through ecoregion-based assessments, district level forestry plans, current best forestry management practices, and providing for consistency with resource protection goals.
- Roads may be constructed if access for resource management or public access is needed and construction can be accomplished in an environmentally protective manner. Existing roads will be maintained in accordance with the DCR road classification system and maintenance policy.
- Additional site-specific inventory and analysis may be needed prior to any of the management activities described above to ensure that no adverse impacts occur to previously un-documented unique and sensitive resources and landscape features.

### **Zone 3**

#### **General Description**

This zone includes constructed or developed administrative, maintenance and recreation sites, structures and resilient landscapes which accommodate concentrated use by recreational visitors and require intensive maintenance by DCR staff. Examples include areas developed and deemed appropriate for park headquarters and maintenance areas, parking lots, swimming pools and skating rinks, paved bikeways, swimming beaches, campgrounds, playgrounds and athletic fields, parkways, golf courses, picnic areas and pavilions, concessions, and areas assessed to be suitable for those uses.

#### **General Management Guidelines**

- The management approach and actions will emphasize public safety conditions and provide for an overall network of accessible facilities that meets the needs of DCR visitors and staff.
- Maintenance of these facilities and associated natural and cultural resources, and new construction or development, will meet state public health code, and state building code and environmental regulations.
- Shorelines and surface waters may be used for recreation within constraints of maintaining public safety and water quality.
- Historic restoration, rehabilitation or reconstruction for interpretation or adaptive reuse of historic structures will be undertaken only in conjunction with a historic restoration plan.
- To the greatest extent possible, construction will include the use of “green design” for structures, such as use of low-flow water fixtures and other water conservation systems or techniques, solar and other renewable energy sources, and the implementation of Best Management Practices to protect the soil and water resources at all facilities.

### **Significant Feature Overlays**

#### **General Description**

The three land stewardship zones may be supplemented with significant feature overlays that identify specific designated/recognized resource features. These significant features are generally identified through an inventory process or research, and are formally designated. The purpose of these overlays is to provide more precise management guidance for identified resources and to recognize, maintain, protect, or preserve unique and significant values, regardless of the zone in which they occur. Examples of significant feature overlays include Forest Reserves, areas subject to public drinking water regulations, or areas subject to historic preservation restrictions.

#### **Management Guidelines**

Specific management guidelines for significant features overlays are provided by resource specialists or by the federal/state/regional/local agency that has recognized and listed the resource or site.